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The Growth and Development of Aviation in Nigeria, 1958-1983

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Abstract

This paper addresses the historical development of Nigeria's aviation industry from 1958 to 1983, with a specific focus on the pivotal role played by Nigeria Airways. The study seeks to understand how Nigeria Airways contributed to the growth and evolution of the aviation sector during this transformative era. The main problem addressed in the paper is the lack of comprehensive analysis of Nigeria Airways' impact on aviation development within the context of Nigerian history. Through a thorough examination of historical documents and literature, the paper argues that Nigeria Airways served as a crucial driver of socio-economic progress, connectivity, and national pride during the period under review. The findings of the paper reveal that Nigeria Airways played a central role in shaping air route development, airport infrastructure, safety standards, and employment generation. The methodology employed involves historical research, including the analysis of secondary sources including scholarly articles, books and internet materials. The paper concludes by highlighting the enduring legacy of Nigeria Airways in Nigeria's aviation history and underscores its significance in the country's journey towards modernization and global prominence.

Keywords: Aviation, Growth, Development, Nigerian Airways, Flight

Introduction

The period spanning from 1958 to 1983 marked a pivotal epoch in the history of Nigeria, witnessing the nation's emergence as a key player on the global stage and a beacon of progress in Africa. Amidst this transformative era, aviation emerged as a powerful catalyst for socio-economic development, connectivity, and national pride. This study delves into the growth and development of aviation in Nigeria during this dynamic period, shedding light on the key drivers, that shaped the country's aviation industry. Nigeria's aviation sector underwent a

remarkable evolution, propelled by a confluence of factors ranging from technological advancements to geopolitical shifts. As the nation sought to assert its sovereignty and assert its place in the world, aviation emerged as a vital tool for fostering regional integration, facilitating trade and commerce, and enhancing connectivity within the country and beyond.

The Beginning

The human desire to fly is as old as mankind. In all ages man's imagination has been stirred by the sight of flying birds and seized by the ambition to sail upon the wind like one of them. There is a long record of ventures, experiments and failures, and the romance of flying still remains one of the most fascinating in the history of mankind. One of the prominent aged-long stories is that of Persius, son of Zeus, head of the Greek gods in Olympia who used Pegasus the winged horse to fly. There are other myths, legends and folklores about the attempt of man to fly.¹³⁶ One of the popularly written documentation of flights observation was that of the Italian Inventor, artist and painter, Leonardo Da Vinci. His life and study of aerodynamics, aerostatics and aeronautics ushered in a new period in the history of mankind's attempt at flight. Leonardo made his first sketches and wrote his first notes on flight in Milan, Italy in 1482.¹³⁷ He realized that by himself man does not possess the ability to engage in flight like birds. According to him, man must be aided by a machine that would enable him fly. He did not see man as a passenger of this means of transport but as co-instrument of the transport machine. To Leonardo, the solution to this problem was to be found in the flight of birds. Thus, he thought by understanding the mystery behind the bird's wing and mechanizing it will open the impossibilities. Leonard tried all sort of possible attempts to fly an aircraft but failed, although his finding further helped the later generation of researchers and inventors.

After the death of Leonardo, scientists of different nationalities in Europe continued to observe and study the science of flight in lighter-than and heavier-than-air forms. By the end of the nineteenth century, a great deal had been achieved in building the foundation on which scientists in the twentieth century based their theories and assertions. Thoughts on aviation gradually developed, culminating in further research and finally in visions not only about its possibility, but also about its advancement in the future that was available then. By 1900, the stage was set for practical demonstration and application of what man had learnt in the over 4000 years of his thoughts, beliefs and research on flight.¹³⁸

The early twentieth century witnessed another dimension as far as aviation in concerned, knowledge was transformed into the invention, development and usage of aircraft, this period

¹³⁶ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008. 51.

¹³⁷ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*. 54.

¹³⁸ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008

is also remarkable because inventors could successfully experiment their inventions with huge success as opposed to 19th century's inventors such as Otto Lilienthal, a German who was killed while experimenting his flying machine. Others are Percy Pilcher, Clement Ader and others who built and made attempts to fly their inventions but with absolute failure. However, by December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright achieved what has been recorded in aviation history, as the first successful heavier-than-air flight in an aeroplane with a petrol engine at Kitty Hawk North Carolina, USA.¹³⁹ It must be noted that the Wright Brother were not the first to fly an aircraft but their experiment were considered to be the most decorated and the most elaborately planned.

The Wright Brothers and European Aviation

The Wright Brothers had a Reverend father who believed that flight was the exclusive preserve of angels but his beliefs did not deter their intention and dream to build an aircraft. The Wright Brothers who used to be bicycle repairer gained several engineering knowledge which afforded them to build the most celebrated heavier-than-air aircraft.¹⁴⁰ According to Decker, one of the things that were evident from their documentation of the historic process of achieving the Heavier-than-Air Flight was secrecy. It generated many controversies in the US and while these were ongoing, Wilbur Wright travelled to Europe where he substantiated his claims for his machine in the presence of French and English nationals. Thus, while Wilbur was proving his ingenuity in Europe, those on the home front were waiting with scepticism and doubts. It was when Wilbur was able to demonstrate the air machine in Europe that the brothers were given credit for their success in the United States. By 1900, the Wright Brothers determined to begin experiments, they sought for the assistantship of Professor Octave Chanute a Frenchman and they followed Otto Lilienthal's system of mastering the art of floating, before attempting sustained flight by means of the attachment of a motor¹⁴¹. They moved from one location to the other during their research for better outcome of their sojourn, several corrections were made after every flight experiment, as a result of practices the Wright Brothers experimented one hundred and five flight over a period of twelve months.¹⁴²

By 1905, their successes had made it to the public and curiosity was the order of the day among the people. The plane the Wright Brothers built in 1905 was called the "White Flyer" in which many improvements were made over previous models.¹⁴³ By 1906, the Wright Brothers

¹³⁹ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*.42.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Hopewood-Lewis: *Griffith Brewer, 'The Wright Brothers' Boswell': Patent Management and the British Aviation Industry, 1903-1914*, *studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, vol. 44, 2013. 259-268.

¹⁴² https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/143715main_process.of_invention.pdf accessed on 25/11/2023

¹⁴³ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008. 13.

concentrated on improvements on the engine. They also reduced their flying activities to reduce the increasing wave of public curiosity. In 1907, they occupied themselves with the perfection of details to their aeroplanes. It was in this year that the brothers first entered into negotiation with some governments in the United States and Europe. However, the Wright brothers' claim, efforts and negotiations did not receive any positive response in the United States because of disbelief and in Europe because of apathy and national pride¹⁴⁴. In trying to achieve the needed recognition, Orville Wright decided to give a demonstration before the government of the United States on a new and more improved airplane from which the brothers expected better results. This was done but with some criticisms and admiration. Despite these criticisms, the influence of the Wright Brothers continued to be noticed across board and was most importantly felt in Europe. This is important to this work because it was from Europe that aviation got to Africa.

The Wright Brother's influence on Europe could not be overestimated, their exploits was considered as having re-awakened European interest in aviation in the first decade of the twentieth century. According to Decker, he stated that Wright's influence was directly responsible for reviving the re-birth of aviation in Europe between 1902 and 1908. More importantly, other European researchers were able to make use of Wright's template and description to build similar aircrafts. Although, their influence was heavy on France in particular but it should be noted that French Aviators such as the Voisin Brothers, Bleirot, Levavasseur, Brequest and a host of others had developed the art of flying an aircraft even before the presence of the Wright Brothers¹⁴⁵ such that it was claimed that the birthplace of aviation as we know it today is Europe, but one fact however remains: the most documented and detailed accounts of the earliest flight experiences were that of Wilbur and Orville Wright. Their flight activities were embarrassingly detailed to the Europeans at the time. Such superiority of documentation proved advantageous to the Wright Brothers when they made efforts to acquire patents for their invention even though those in charge did not accept the possibility. It took a legal battle on the part of the Wrights to do so.¹⁴⁶

In Europe, aviation received popularity because of the activities of the Aeronautic clubs and societies¹⁴⁷, the proliferation and influence of articles in journals and the celebrated opinions and conclusions of notable aviators. These together promoted the spread of knowledge on

¹⁴⁴ Omega East, *Wright Brothers* Washington DC: Historical Handbook Series No. 34, 1961. 42.

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Hopewood-Lewis: *Griffith Brewer, 'The Wright Brothers' Boswell': Patent Management and the British Aviation Industry, 1903-1914*, *studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, vol. 44, 2013. 260.

¹⁴⁶ Guillaume de Syon, "Faded Memories: The Wright Brothers and Germany, 1909-1913" accessed from <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=following>

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Hopewood-Lewis: *Griffith Brewer, 'The Wright Brothers' Boswell': Patent Management and the British Aviation Industry*. 171.

aviation. The aeronautic societies in Britain and France were most active. But in Britain from where Aviation got to Nigeria, the Aeronautical Society, later named Royal Aeronautical Society had an overriding influence. The society was considered to be radical and progressive such that developments were constant¹⁴⁸ and by 1925, Nigeria as a colony of Britain, welcomed the first aircraft in her Northern part. This marked the beginning of Aviation history in Nigeria which shall be the major line of focus in the following paragraphs.

The Historical Background of Aviation in Nigeria

In 1885, African societies had been shared among the Europeans powers in the meeting convened by Otto Von Bismarck and colonialism had started in earnest.¹⁴⁹ But one of the major problems faced by the Mother countries in the administration of their many colonies was communication. The popular means of communication and transportation at this period were the water and land transportation system which were grossly slow and ineffective. For Britain, information from the Queen gets to the colonies only months after. This was the first problem that birthed aviation in Nigeria and Africa at large, the other important development that enhanced aviation in Africa was the First World War. The production of aircraft was rapid during the war just so they were used as fighting weapon for aerial surveillance and bombing of enemies. All these created the interest of the Governments in aviation. After the war, the pilots that were recruited to fly at the war remained in the service of the Queen of England, they were further regrouped and renamed the Royal Air Force (RAF)¹⁵⁰. From then on, air activities of Britain in Africa increased. It should be noted that RAF carried out air survey and flew over Khartoum and Cairo before getting to Nigeria in 1925.

The First Aircraft in Nigeria

There are so many accounts surrounding the history of the landing of the first aircraft in Nigeria nevertheless there are some common facts that are generally agreed upon. One on the conflicting facts given by various sources is the actual date and time. Some sources stated that the flight was conducted between June and July of 1925, other sources indicate that the flight was conducted between January and February of the year during harmattan. Another stated that it was in November. Secondly, the location of the event remains a matter of contestation among scholars and historians. While most argued it was Kano, some believed it was Maiduguri, some claimed the Kano experience was an accident of history, stating that Kano was not the final destination of the flight, the flight only turned in the direction of Kano when it received

¹⁴⁸ Peter Fearon, 'The Growth of Aviation in Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 21-40

¹⁴⁹ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008

¹⁵⁰ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*

information from Britain to do so. Third, proper description of the site where the aircraft landed was not agreed upon, some claimed it was on a Polo ground, others claimed it was a race course. Some even claimed it landed right in the city centre.¹⁵¹

Fourth, while most sources agreed that the aircraft was a British Royal Air Force plane, they differ on the type of aircraft, while some stated that it was a Bristol Fighter, others stated that it was a DeHavilland 9A. Fifth, the mission of the expedition is another issue surrounding the first landing. Some sources opined that it was just a mere air survey of the colonies to facilitate airfield and air routes around the West African Coast. Some believed the landing was a ‘child of crisis’. They stated that the aircraft landed to have an on-the-spot assessment of the Kano Riot that ensued against the high-handedness of Kano’s District Resident Officer’s after Sir Clifford, the then Nigeria Governor General could not handle the crisis.¹⁵²

Despite the various conflicting issues rising from different accounts about the history of the first flight in Nigeria, these available sources agreed that the year was 1925 that the first aircraft landed in Nigeria and it was engineered and championed by the British Government although the purpose was not to expose Nigeria to the new invention but, to promote the smooth running of her colony in terms of strengthening communication link with the home country and enforcing law and order. Aviation in Nigeria witnessed one growth after the other, such as development of airfields or aerodromes, airports, air strips, air routes and other aviation infrastructures, and the sustaining of an effective regulatory policy.

From 1925, the aviation affairs in Nigeria and West Africa in general were fully in the capacity of the colonial masters, (The British). As it was noted above, the major facilitator of Aviation in Africa was to bridge the communication gap between the colonies in Africa and Britain, and this later turned out to be of utmost benefit during the Second World War. The Royal Air Force had smooth use of aviation industry in Africa during the war. After the war, there arose the need to make Aviation fully civil. Britain could not afford to continue air services with the use of RAF aircrafts as it was not built primarily for commercial venture therefore Aviation development in colonial territories in British West Africa remained an issue of concern for the Secretary for the Colonies and the Imperial Government. Furthermore, Decker noted that the economic recession which occurred in Europe after the war had compelled a wide influx of Europeans to the West Coast of Africa, which became a source of raw material products. This resulted in the development of wide market in the West Coast and the consequent economic boom. Despite these, Aviation in Africa most especially in West Africa could not be managed independently. It was on this note that in 1946, the West Africa Territories (Air Transport)

¹⁵¹ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*

¹⁵² Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008

Order established the West Africa Air Transport Authority and the West Africa Airways Corporation (WAAC), each comprising of the Four (4) West African British Colonial territories, Nigeria, Gold Coast (Ghana), Sierra Leone and The Gambia to take over air services previously run by the RAF.¹⁵³

Nigeria Airways and West African Airways Corporation (WAAC)

WAAC operated from 1946 to 1958. Nigeria was the major shareholder sixty eight percent, followed by the Gold Coast (29.5%), Sierra Leone (2%), and The Gambia holding the balance. The carrier had its headquarters at the Airways House in Ikeja, Nigeria, and operated from its hub in Lagos Airport. It started operation with a capital of about 465,000 pounds funded by the four colonies following the delivery of its first aircraft.¹⁵⁴ The De Havilland Dove aircraft inaugurated WAAC's first scheduled service from Lagos to Calabar during October 1947. The company was aimed at providing the British West Africa with air transport facilities, to connecting it with Dakar and Khartoum in order to provide passengers with a gateway to the Americas and the Middle East, respectively. WAAC became very popular in the early 1950s for offering second-class services at discounted airfares, cheaper than any other means of transportation until 1958.¹⁵⁵ WAAC was dissolved on 30 September 1958, after all the shareholder countries but Nigeria set up their own national airlines following their independence, with Ghana taking the lead under the leadership of Kwameh Nkrumah. Ghana established the Ghana Airways, Sierra-Leone, Sierra Leone Airways, and The Gambia, Gambia Air Shuttle. Nigeria on her part was left with no choice than to establish her own airline as well

Nigeria indigenized West Africa Airways Corporation. It became WAAC (Nigeria) Limited, at this point, the shares was jointly owned with the British Overseas African Company (BOAC) and Elder Dempster, a British Shipping Line. Nigeria owned fifty one percent of the shares.¹⁵⁶ On 1st May 1961, the government bought all the shares of WAAC (Nigeria) Limited and was eventually renamed Nigeria Airways. It should be noted that from the time WAAC (Nigeria) Limited became a Nigerian Registered Company, it traded as Nigeria Airways. WAAC (Nigeria) Limited was used only on legal documents for all other purposes including publicity, general correspondence, public announcement etc. Nigeria Airways was thus an expression,

¹⁵³ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*. 17.

¹⁵⁴ Oghojafor, Ben Emukufia Akpoyomare and Alaneme, Gloria Chinyere, 'Nigeria Airways: The Grace and Grass Experience (A Case Study)', *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 13; December 2014

¹⁵⁵ Ogbeidi Michael M, 'The Aviation Industry in Nigeria: A Historical Overview', *Lagos Historical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp.133–147

¹⁵⁶ Oghojafor, Ben Emukufia Akpoyomare and Alaneme, Gloria Chinyere, 'Nigeria Airways: The Grace and Grass Experience (A Case Study)', *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 13; December 2014

not a legal entity. It became a legal entity in 1961 after Chief Ladoke Akintola, the then Minister of Aviation and communication was able to rally Federal Government interest and support towards establishing the airline. Chief Akintola, inspired by Kwameh Nkrumah kick started Nigeria Airways by arranging and signing an agreement with the Fokker aircraft works in Holland where Nigeria Airways bought its middle range jet for Nigeria's domestic and West Africa routes. Akintola further advised the Nigeria Government to own a controlling share and also make sure that the policy of Nigerianization was vigorously pursued.¹⁵⁷

From 1961, the Nigerian flag carrier started operating under the name Nigeria Airways Limited (NAL) using the country's national colours green, white, green all over the aircraft, vehicles and equipment. The airline quickly entered into long haul international travel and towards the end of the 1960s, it was granted access into New York by the United States Government. The airline progressed in its operations. The Chairman of the Board of Directors was Chief T.T. Solaru who was first Nigerian chairman when the corporation was still known as WAAC (Nigeria) Limited. He was succeeded by late Chief J.O. Fadahunsi. The trade mark and emblem became the flying elephant described as sky power with the logo. Nigeria Airways was code named W.T. Meaning West African Transport. She inherited this from WAAC and remained it till 2004 when it was liquidated by Government.¹⁵⁸

NAL had its head office at Airways house in Abuja having been moved from Murtala Muhammed Airport between 1999 and 2000. It has a major hub at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos and secondary hubs at the Mallam Aminu International Airport, Kano as well as Port Harcourt International Airport.¹⁵⁹ The Nigeria Airways had a mission "To be the safest leading airline in Africa". The various slogans used by the airline were; "West African Hopper" (1973), "Western gateway to fabulous Africa" (1990), "Skypower throughout Africa" and "Nigerian Airways: the friendly way to fly" (1994).¹⁶⁰

The Nigerian Airways had the following specific objectives: to carry on business as an air transport undertaking and to do anything calculated to facilitate or is incidental or conducive to the same; Establish, operate, manage and arrange for the operation of air transport services for the carriage of passengers, baggage, mail and freight to and from territories of West Africa or to and from or within any such territories to any other parts of the world as the company

¹⁵⁷ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Oladapo Ogunbodede and Christopher Odetunde: 'Current status of civil aviation in Nigeria', *International Journal of Aviation Management*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2016

¹⁵⁹ Ogbeidi Michael M, 'The Aviation Industry in Nigeria: A Historical Overview', *Lagos Historical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1. 133-147.

¹⁶⁰ Ogbojafor, Ben Emukufia Akpoyomare and Alaneme, Gloria Chinyere, 'Nigeria Airways: The Grace and Grass Experience (A Case Study)', *International [J]ournal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 13; December 2014

may think expedient; Provide and operate such service at cost plus commission on an agreed basis on revenue collected; To offer support services in case of national emergency for transportation of goods and persons; Do business in the same manner as other companies to enhance profitability.; and serves as outlet for employment of the teeming youth population ¹⁶¹ Technically, according to Tunde Decker, the airline was established to carry out the business of air transportation and to Provide scheduled and chartered air transportation services for the carriage of passengers, cargo and mails for posts and telecommunications on both domestic and international routes in the most profitable and efficient manner; Provide an adequate domestic network connecting all state capitals and commercial centres; Project and assist in the development of the country's economy by flying to airports dictated by the federal government; Project the image of the country by operating in conformity with laws of Nigeria and other places to which the airline operates as well as observe the International Air Transport Authority (IATA) regulations and airline conventional practices; Ensure that the service rendered is efficient, effective and safe and that such services meet world standard; Maintain industry harmony and peace; Act as back up for the Nigeria Air Force and army as an auxiliary transport in the event of war or national emergency. ¹⁶²

Fleet of the Nigeria Airways

The airline operated the aircrafts throughout its history such as, Airbus A310-200, Aztec, BAC One-Eleven 400, Boeing 707-320, Boeing 707-320B, Boeing 707-320C, Boeing 727-100, Boeing 727-200, Boeing 737-200, Boeing 737-200C, Boeing 747-100, Boeing 747-200, Boeing 747-200B, Boeing 747-200 Combi, Boeing 747-200F, Boeing 747-300, Boeing 767-200ER, Boeing 767-300ER, Britannia 100, Comet, Douglas C-47A, Douglas DC-3, Douglas DC-8-30, Douglas DC-8-50, Douglas DC-8-60, Dove, Fokker F27-200, Fokker F27-400, Fokker F27-600, Fokker F-28-100, Fokker F-28-200, Fokker F-28-400, Heron, McDonnell Douglas DC-10-10, McDonnell Douglas DC-10-30, Vickers VC-10 and Vickers Viscount 810.¹⁶³

Nigeria Airways' Management and Administration

As part of the public sectors and fully run as one, the Nigeria Airways had its planning, development and management of the industry reflecting the characteristics of public enterprises management. At a time, the airline was managed by a number of foreign companies, including British Airways, KLM and even South African Airways. It was assumed to have its peak in the

¹⁶¹ Oghojafor, Ben Emukufia Akpoyomare and Alaneme, Gloria Chinyere, 'Nigeria Airways: The Grace and Grass Experience (A Case Study)', *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 13; December 2014

¹⁶² Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008.

¹⁶³ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*

early 1980s during the KLM team two-year-management period. Later on, the managements responsibility fell on the shoulder of periodic boards constituted by the Federal Government with a Chairman, Chief Executive Officer/Managing Director and Executive members, all appointed by the Federal Government. These boards had between five and seven members. The Company Secretary served both the Executive board and the Management board. The tenures of management and top officials of Nigeria airways were about two or less years as it recorded five (5) chief executives within thirteen years. The industry was regulated by the Ministry of Transport and Aviation. In funding and profit, the airline was largely funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria being the principal shareholder. and in aviation market, the monopoly it enjoyed in the Nigeria Aviation Industry as the sole airline in the nation gave it a large surge in revenue. The Nigeria Airways during its existence reaped in billions of Naira in revenue for the country. These fortunes however changed when government ministries and officials used the services of the airline without paying for these services. These radically reduce the finances of the airline. A report of inquiry during the period 1961 – 1965 showed that before 1961-62 the airline was making profit, but afterwards it operated at a loss, which totalled more than £500,000 in 1963-64 and the officers of the airline were accused of lack of financial control, mismanagement and laxity in the recovery of debts¹⁶⁴. If there was any loss in the early years of operation it was not strikingly visible because of the government subsidy.

Nigerian Airways: Growth and Development

To discuss Nigeria Aviation development in Nigeria without Nigeria airways is in tandem to being subjective; it would not be an overstatement to say that the history of Nigeria aviation from 1958 was primarily the history of Nigeria Airways. The airline started on a very formidable pedestal. It enjoyed the monopoly of the air service market and it was fully funded by the Government. The development of the Nigeria Airways was so evident to the extent that at a time, according to Decker, Nigerians could not differentiate between the responsibility of the Nigeria Airport Authority (NAA) and other aviation parastatals which was charged with the responsibility of airport developments/maintenance and Nigeria Airways itself.¹⁶⁵

Air Routes Development

Nigeria Airways in the period of our study had one of the best international records among African airlines acquiring terminals in Europe and the United States. It was the first African Airline to acquire a terminal in the United States particularly the John F. Kennedy international airport. The airline also developed and serviced international routes including the Lagos-

¹⁶⁴ Oghojafor, Ben Emukufia Akpoyomare and Alaneme, Gloria Chinyere, 'Nigeria Airways: The Grace and Grass Experience (A Case Study)', *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 13; December 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008.

London route. This route became the most lucrative international air route in Nigeria's aviation industry. Between 1960 and 1980 Nigeria Airways and British Caledonian Airways virtually monopolized the route. According to an aviation analyst, "if we consider the forces of supply and demand, the routes (Lagos-London) is where the action is..."¹⁶⁶ Virtually every Nigerian wants to go by the routes because it is direct. It reduces stress and is more reliable. If we consider baggage handling, the ultimate beneficiary is the consumer.

Another aviation consultant remarked, "the Lagos-London route is next to London-New York when you talk of lucrative routes in the world. Nigerians are restless people. They move a lot and particularly to England and that is why the market is there."¹⁶⁷ It was confirmed that the consistency of the Nigerian Airways on this routes was far greater than the British Airways. Hundreds of millions of pounds sterling was generated by the airline. These were possible because throughout the time Nigeria Airways serviced this route, no other Nigerian airline was commissioned by government to compete with it, and none of them however, had the financial capability to muster the needed challenge. The Lagos-London route was at 1988 worth 220 million pounds annually.¹⁶⁸ The Nigeria Airways existence was responsible for the development of several international and local routes that remains till today.

Airport Development

By 1960s there were national interests in Nigeria to situate airports in all state capitals so other part of the country could be opened up for investment. The reality is that the development of airports is essential to the nation's economy because it serves as one of the major gateways through which goods, services, and potential investors come into the country. Furthermore, the economic boom of the 1970s snowballed into greater demand for both international and domestic air travel. It became evident to policy makers that the available infrastructure was grossly inadequate. Thus, the federal government included the Aerodrome Development Programme in the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980). To ensure proper implementation of the project government removed the airport development and management from the direct control of the defunct Ministry of Civil Aviation. In 1976, a new body, the Nigerian Airports Authority (NAA) was created by Decree 45 to implement the Aerodrome Development Programme and to, thereafter manage all the airports in the country.¹⁶⁹

Between 1978 and 1984, a number of new airports with modern facilities were constructed in Enugu, Yola, Port Harcourt, Sokoto, Kaduna, Jos, Calabar and Ibadan, bringing the number of

¹⁶⁶ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008. 13

¹⁶⁷ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*. 15.

¹⁶⁸ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*. 16.

¹⁶⁹ Salisu Ojonemi and Chikelue Ofuebe, 'Aviation Roadmap and Development of Airports in Nigeria', *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa (JGGSDA)*, Vol. 5, No 1, 2019. 98.

airports in the country to fifteen. All airports in the country were essentially administered for the operations of the Nigeria Airways and to service the routes that were single-handedly developed and operated by the airline between 1961 and 1984. By 2000 there were 19 airports staffed and operated by the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria.¹⁷⁰

Nigeria Airways and Safety/Maintenance

The management of the Nigeria Airways attached so much importance to safety checks and security issues, as it was tagged in the our period of study as the safest and most reliable airline in Africa. Due to this safety consciousness, flights are cancelled in situations where it discovered that there are safety issues, whereas other airlines damned the consequence and continued with the flight.¹⁷¹ This earned the airline a tag of inefficiency since there was frequent flight rescheduling and cancellation so as to maintain safety. Available records have also shown that Nigeria Airways had a close working relationship with the Nigerian Airports Authority and its management teams often contributed towards monitoring and inspection of airport facilities across the country. Air Vice Marshall Anthony Okpere was noted for his routine inspection of airports. In addition, the Nigerian Airways pilots were some of the best in the field, such that some of the airlines' pilots were used by the Nigerian Air Force during the Nigerian Civil War to fly through routes that were regarded as very precarious¹⁷². The airlines' pilots were known to be strong advocates of safety.

In maintaining aircrafts, Engineering and maintenance of aircraft was considered a safety factor in Nigeria Airways. Maintenance went through four A-D levels, the fourth level being engine overhaul. The maintenance department did up to B level and arrangement was made to provide facilities, which would enable the airline upgrade, its maintenance capability to the third or C level. Before maintenance was carried out, checks were done outside the country. Later, the airline was able to do periodic checks on its aircrafts, for instance, checks were made on the B737 fleet the airline carried out A, B and C checks; on the B707 fleet¹⁷³ among others.

Socio-economically, the airline provided employment for tens of thousands of people. At its peak, the defunct Nigerian national carrier employed close to ten thousand workers in its Nigerian and foreign offices.¹⁷⁴ This estimate does not include huge revenue that various travel

¹⁷⁰ Osi S. Akpoghomeh, 'The Development of Air Transportation in Nigeria', *Journal of Transport Geography* 7 (1999) 146

¹⁷¹ Samuel A. Igbatayo & Sunday O. Igbinedion, "The State Of Nigeria's Aviation Industry and Implications For Economic Development" accessed from <https://www.globalacademicgroup.com/journals/knowledge%20review/Samuel333.pdf>

¹⁷² Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*, Dele-Davis Publishers, Lagos, 2008.

¹⁷³ Decker Tunde, *A History of Aviation in Nigeria 1925-2005*.

¹⁷⁴ Ogbeidi Michael M, 'The Aviation Industry in Nigeria: A Historical Overview', *Lagos Historical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1. 133–147.

agencies reaped through service charge from air passenger of Nigeria airways. The Nigeria Airways in Nigeria also provides gateways through which tourists come in to visit the various tourism sites scattered all over the country. The tourism industry has also given rise to tour operators who also serve as travel agencies, providing jobs for many. Tourism is an allied business to aviation and is capable of generating huge revenue if properly harnessed.¹⁷⁵

As earlier noted, the developments of Aviation in Nigeria in the period of our study were indeed the development of the Nigeria Airways and vice versa. Most developments that were successfully put in place by the government would not have been vigorously executed in the absence of a national carrier. The pushing force for these developments was the Nigeria Airways. The government were intentionally clear to give the national carrier the necessary space to adequately serve the county.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the period from 1958 to 1983 marked a transformative era in Nigeria's aviation history, with Nigeria Airways playing a central role in driving the industry's growth and development. From its pioneering routes to its commitment to safety and maintenance standards, Nigeria Airways exemplified operational excellence and contributed significantly to national progress. As a catalyst for economic growth, employment generation, and tourism development, the airline symbolized the interconnectedness of aviation infrastructure and societal advancement. The legacy of Nigeria Airways continues to resonate, underscoring the enduring impact of aviation on Nigeria's journey towards modernization and global prominence.

¹⁷⁵ <https://professions.ng/aviation-safety-standards/> accessed on 29/11/2022.

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